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ADDRESS

at the

Ceremony of Laying of the Corner Stone

of the

SEAMEN'S INSTITUTE,

At South Street and Coenties Slip,

April 16th, 1912.



By

EDMUND L. BAYLIES,

Chairman of Building Committee.

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EDMUND L. BAYLIES,

Chairman of the Building Committee at the Laying  
of the Corner Stone of the Seamen's Institute at  
South Street and Coenties Slip, New York City,  
Tuesday, April 16, 1912.

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MR. MAYOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, it is a very touching day to me in more ways than one, to see the realization of a project for which my friends and I have been striving these many years. It is peculiarly appropriate, I think, that this building, which was founded for sailors, should have the laying of its corner stone on a day when the thoughts of every man in the civilized world have turned towards the sea, towards those who must travel over the sea, and towards those who conduct the navigation of the ships, large and small, that traverse its waters.

I would gladly speak only of the deep interest that we all have in sailors, only of the picturesque and of the sad sides of his life, but it is my duty to-day, and I believe that I should on this occasion, speaking as Chairman of the Building Committee, give you a short idea of what *this* work means: first, its history, how it came into being; secondly, the Institute as we see it, shortly to be completed,

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NOTE.—The Corner Stone was laid by Hon. William J. Gaynor, Mayor of the City of New York.

what it is to-day; and, thirdly, what we hope the future may have in store for it—what it will one day become.

In the year 1843, a group of young men known as the Young Men's Church Missionary Society, turned their attention to the condition of the seamen of this port, and resolved to do work among them to help them. In the year 1844, a charter was obtained from the State of New York, authorizing these young men and their associates to become a corporation, and own, acquire and hold floating and other churches, for seamen, in this city, where the seats should always be free. That was done, and a succession of floating churches has, for many years, graced the eastern shores of the Island of Manhattan. It was only a year ago that the change in the shifting population of this island, driving the sailors elsewhere, and away from their former haunts, compelled us to give up our picturesque, old floating church, but we have, and will have, in this building a place where seamen may still, when they so desire, enjoy the privileges of religious worship.

In the year 1854 our charter was amended so as to authorize the Society to maintain one or more houses "for the boarding, lodging and entertaining of Seamen and Boatmen in the City and Port of New York." The authority thus granted has ripened, or is now ripening, into the building which is rising on this corner. It is a work of progress.

Our first sailors' home, fifty years ago, was in Pearl Street, and would accommodate about twenty-five men. Some twenty-five years later, we moved up to Market Street, and there we had a home for fifty men. Four years ago, we moved over to Brooklyn, and established "The Breakwater", and there we can accommodate one hundred

men; and in this building, when completed, we hope to accommodate five hundred and fifty men at one time.

For many years, this Society did no work, which could be called, aggressive. It had its reading rooms. One of these was on this very Slip, which was the center, and still is, of the canal boat traffic, and the canal boat men and their wives and children used to enjoy the hospitality of the mission rooms through the ministrations of the clergyman who was in charge. We also established reading rooms in other parts of the city. But the work of the Society consisted chiefly in the distribution of Bibles, and of tracts: calling upon the sailors when they were ill; visiting them on their ships; and holding services to which they might come, if they wished, on Sunday.

In our first sailors' boarding house, there was very little to attract seamen, and only the better class of seamen and a few sea captains attended. But when we increased the size of our boarding house, we decided that we must minister to every grade of seamen, and we now hope to interest them all.

We found that the sailor in these earlier times was glad to come to our rooms, to get what little benefit he could out of us, yet he rather mistrusted us. We were then known as a missionary society, and anyone who knows a sailor, knows that he distrusts a missionary. We changed our name, and we changed our tactics. We felt that we must first win the sailor by showing him that we were both useful and necessary to him. We knew, if we could once gain the sailor's heart, if he once knew that he could find us giving him the things that he needed, we knew that we had won the sailor, and that then, if he was in trouble, if he was in need of any kind, he would come to us, and we could help him.

And so, some years ago,—it is now some twelve or fifteen years ago,—we began broadening out our work and doing what might be called settlement work among the sailors.

It was nearly fifteen years ago that the Bishop of London said, deliberately, that he had been informed by British seamen, that the port of New York was the *worst port* that they went to anywhere on the civilized globe. And those of us who knew the conditions that prevailed along the waterfront in those days, know that this statement was true. There was very little chance for a sailor, unless he was a man of exceptional force, if he landed in New York fifteen years ago, to escape the hands of the ring of sailors' boarding house keepers, and crimps, and shipping masters who lay in wait for him. Why, when a ship used to come into view in the lower harbor, down along Staten Island, by Tompkinsville, the anchor was scarcely down, when two or three row boats would put off from the shore, in which there would be men from these various sailors' boarding houses, carrying bottles of whiskey in their pockets. They would board the ship, and would get the sailors to agree to go to them; they would make them all feel happy, giving them all the whiskey they could drink; they thus got hold of them and took them back to their boarding houses in this city. The boarding house keeper would conduct the sailor to his boarding house, wherever it happened to be, and would accompany the sailor when he was paid off, he would thus get his hand on the sailor's money, and the sailor never left that boarding house until he went to sea again, and he then had very little to show for his money except a little dissipation.

Now, when we started in to attack this sailors' problem,

we knew we would have to deal with these boarding house keepers, and with the class of men that did that sort of business, and it meant practically the closing up of that business, and I think we have done it. We have not done it single-handed, but we have been the leaders and chief movers in that fight. We found that we would have, in the first place, to be able to say to the sailor: "If you come to us, we will get you a berth on an outgoing ship; we will find employment for you." To do that, we had to make arrangements with certain shipping authorities, with various ships, single ships and lines of ships, and say to them, "If you will come to us, make a contract with us, we will furnish you with men." We did it with grave hesitancy, for we were very much afraid that when we started in to do that work, the ring of sailors' boarding house keepers would prevent us; but we went ahead, and little by little, the work grew. First, we shipped one ship in two months; and then two ships in three months, and now we are shipping great numbers of ships, so that the work has grown, and we now ship or find employment on ships in this port, for four thousand sailors a year.

You perhaps do not know how severe this contest was, but I cannot better illustrate it than to tell you that it is less than ten years ago when a man who was employed in our boarding house as a runner to take care of our sailors, and find places for them on ships, was threatened by one of the most notorious crimps in this port, with bodily injury, and to protect himself, he had to pull his pistol, and he shot and killed the crimp. He was tried. On the first trial, he was found guilty and was condemned to a long term of imprisonment; but the trial was shown to have been singularly unfair, the verdict was set aside, and on the

second trial, the man was acquitted. His life, however, was not safe in New York, and we had to find him a place where he might work in another part of the country.

I have stated that we won the sailor's interest by showing him we could find a place for him and give him employment. We also showed him that we could be of assistance to him in keeping his money.

As recently as 1898 a man going to sea might go to sign his shipping contract, and sign away his first three months' wages. These always went to the boarding house keeper and the crimp. In 1898, largely due to the efforts of this Society, Congress passed a law preventing a sailor from signing away more than one month's wages. That lessened the hold of the crimp upon the sailor. He was not then quite as valuable prey as he had been.

But we found that the only way to save the sailor's money, was to be on hand when the sailor was paid off. And through the courtesy and kindly interest of the former British Consul General, Sir Percy Sanderson, we were enabled to have a desk in the British Consular Shipping Office, where the men were paid off. When they received their wages after long voyages, men often got as much as \$150. or \$200., the first money they had had, perhaps, for six or eight months, and it was in their pockets, and they were willing to spend it. If they got out on the street, the money was sure to go. The only way of helping that sailor was to get at him before he left that room, and persuade him to give us some of his money, either to keep it for him and dole it out to him as he might need it, or to send at least part of it home to his family. In that way, during the last ten years we have received over one million one hundred thousand dollars, of sailors' money, that has been saved to

them. (Applause.) And it has helped their wives and their dependent ones.

And so this Institute, this Society, carrying on this work, became a great power in this port among the sailors. Through the Seamen's Branch of the Legal Aid Society we provided for the sailor who had suffered wrong. We saw that his wrongs were righted. If it was in a case of assault and battery by a mate, if it was a case of his clothes being kept back by his boarding house keeper, if it was a case of his being robbed, we supplied the legal talent that was necessary to safeguard his interests and to regain his property.

I have told you how this work has grown, and how, beginning in a small way—almost seventy years ago, we gradually progressed and established a firm foundation for this work. But the time came when we felt that we must concentrate our work, and have one large building where this work could make its home.

In this building, the sailors will have, in the first place, their lodgings of different grades. We have dormitories each accommodating thirty men, where men can lodge for ten or fifteen cents a night, just as they could in the Salvation Army rooms. We have cubicles where men can sleep for twenty-five or thirty cents a night, each room having its own chair and bed, a strip of carpet, a small press for clothes, and its own light. These are the rooms in which many people have become interested, and for which they have given us sums of \$100, that amount furnishing and building a room such as I have described. Such rooms are often given as a memorial of the donor, or in memory of some friend, or relative of the donor, some member of his family who may have been connected

with the Navy, or who may have died at sea. Many such memorials have already been given to us, and of the 390 rooms of this kind, in less than a year, we have already disposed of 226.

Then there are the larger rooms for captains, or for petty officers. These also can be given in the same way, at \$250. each, and some of these have already been taken.

Many of the large rooms of the building have also been taken as memorials. One instance was that of Philip Ruprecht, the late head of the so-called Foreign Department of the Standard Oil Company, in charge of the ships employed to carry oil to the most distant parts of the world. He died about a year ago, and his friends in the New York Produce Exchange and in the Maritime Exchange, subscribed \$2,000., and gave that amount to us to build and furnish as a memorial the large reading and game room for officers in our new building.

Then we have similar recreation rooms for the seamen. We have another room for the apprentices; the young men who are learning to be officers. We also have a large auditorium where all kinds of entertainments will be given; where there will be moving pictures, where there will be lectures, where there will be singing, where there will be amateur acting, where there will be every kind of entertainment that should please the sailor, and give him an excuse for remaining in this building, with no necessity for going up into the Bowery, or going into other disreputable parts of the city.

Another feature of the building will be its chapel, which will be on the ground floor on Coenties Slip, and which is not to be confined to the service of any one denomination, or of any one language. Clergymen of all denominations

and all languages will be asked there to address the seamen who come to this Institute, and I can assure you that the fingers of one hand would not be sufficient to number the many languages in which those services must be held.

In our basement just under where I am now standing, will be a large room where seamen can go to obtain employment. It will be a free shipping bureau. There is a similar bureau in No. 1 State Street at the present time, from which we ship about four thousand men a year, and here we will have better facilities, and we hope to do a much larger business.

Near by (and it is one of the most important things that has happened to us) we have, under the farther end of the room where you are now sitting, a space reserved for the Shipping Office of the British Consul. Every man during the next ten years, coming into this port on a British ship, who is paid off in this port, or who goes out on a British ship, and signs articles in this port, will have to go to that office, to be paid off and to sign on. In other words, a great number of British seamen will have to come to this building, and this necessarily will make it known. They will set the fashion of coming to this building.

Besides, only a few short steps away is the office of the United States Shipping Commissioner, where all sailors on American ships are signed on and paid off. And they, too, will find it very easy to come from that office to this building. So I think, from the very outset, this building will prove a great magnet for seamen. It will attract them as furnishing them what they need, and will therefore, from the outset, be a place where sailors' life will center, and where everything interesting to the sailor will be talked about, thought about,

and all the various problems concerning him will be worked out.

We have taken almost seven years to arrive at the point which we have reached to-day, so that you see this is not a whirlwind campaign; but I don't regret the delay. Had we attempted to build this building a few years ago, it would have been built and filled with countless mistakes. We did not then understand the sailor problem as we know it to-day, and, knowing it as we now do, we think that the building, intricately fitted as it will be, from top to bottom, will serve the sailors' needs, and that there will be no waste space, that everything will have a distinct and useful purpose.

It was in the month of December, 1905, that I signed the contract for the first lot on which this building now stands. It was in January, 1910, that I signed the fifth contract for the balance of the land, and it will be in the spring of 1913 that we hope to see this building opened and filled. The building furnished will cost about \$675,000.; the land has cost \$242,500. In all it will cost between \$900,000. and \$950,000. for the land and building all complete and ready for use.

Of that amount, all but about \$250,000. has been already subscribed; and I feel perfectly confident within the coming year, when we are able to come down to this building and point to it, and say, this is what we propose to do, look at what we have done; I believe, without a doubt, that the public spirited citizens of New York will respond; and that the balance of the money needed will be forthcoming; and that this building about a year hence will be open and ready for its great work. I hope that everyone who is listening to me to-day will be here at that time, and see

how complete it will be, and how useful. It may seem a large sum of money, but the reason that we have built so large a building is, first, that we know that it is needed, and it can be filled; and secondly, it costs so much to administer a plant, even a small plant, that unless you can have a large number of people accommodated, you will not make it a paying success.

Now, if we have the same experience that they have had in the Mills' Hotels, and I think we will, we shall be able to make at least two or three per cent. on our investment, and with that we will be able to have a little surplus cash with which to serve the sailor, either by helping him in distress, or helping him towards his amusements, and by providing additional reading matter, and making the building more generally attractive. In other words, we hope that when this building is once opened, free from debt, it will be self-sustaining, and that it will do good for the sailor, which it is impossible at this time in words to measure.

Lastly, I want to say a word about what we hope our Institute will become. Our story has been one of slow growth, of feeling our way, the story of all true evolution. We aim to make this building the great center of work for sailors, for the improvement of the sailors' condition in this port, and in all other ports. This is the greatest port of our country. What is done for sailors here will be a model and inspiration for work among them elsewhere. This building will be a clearing house for sailors' needs, temporal as well as spiritual, and where no question of religious denominations will ever be raised. Sailors will go forth from here with a new heart in their work, self-respecting, their money saved, and with the knowledge that when they re-

turn to this port, the Institute will always give them a warm welcome.

To ship owners, too, this work should prove a great boon, for it will enable them to obtain sailors who can be put on board sober, and sailors for whom no "blood money" has been paid to the crimps, or shipping masters.

I am very glad to see that we have to-day with us, Consuls and Consular Officers of many foreign governments, representatives of our City Government, members and officers of the Chamber of Commerce, of the Maritime Exchange, of the Produce Exchange, and of the Merchants' Exchange. The presence of these representative men shows the interest which those who watch the future of our port, take in this project. For its permanent success, it needs, and must secure and retain, the good will of the community.

When we learn the full details of the overwhelming disaster which has just taken place,\* I feel sure that the minds and hearts of each one of my hearers will be thrilled with deeds of heroism on the part of sailors. The history of the sea is full of such examples, and in attempting to establish here a home for some of the five hundred thousand men who annually come to our port, we landmen are paying but a very small portion of the debt which we owe to those who follow the sea, exercising such faithful and watchful care over those who travel on the great deep.

We wish to declare to-day that this building is to be dedicated to the seamen of all nations. (Applause.)

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\* Referring to the loss of the S. S. Titanic April 15th, 1912.